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INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6779
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LA PAZ 001366

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PASS TO WHA/FO CSHAPIRO, WHA/AND LPETRONI, PM DAS MCOULTER,
JBURNETT, OSD LTCOL DMCDONALD, WHA/FO GSNIDLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: PM DAS COULTER VISIT TO BOLIVIA

Classified By: Amb. Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs Michael Coulter, as well as WHA/FO Sr. Advisor Giovanni Snidle, PM desk officer Jeff Burnett, and Lt. Col. Daniel McDonald of the Office of the Secretary of Defense visited Bolivia May 9-10 in response to the positive overtures made by the GOB in recent months (beginning at the 7th Annual Defense Ministerial of the Americas, held October 2006 in Managua), to explore opportunities to further military-military relations and to lay the groundwork for Minister of Defense Walker San Miguel's mid-June visit to the United States. The Bolivian military briefed Coulter on its peacekeeping operations, including its plans to open a peacekeeping center in Santa Cruz, and gave him a tour of a military police battalion and naval facilities. Coulter met with Defense Minister Walker San Miguel, who indicated that Bolivia wants to deepen mil-mil relations with the United States. San Miguel and all of Coulter's military interlocutors emphasized peacekeeping, capacity building and force modernization, with all making pitches for continued U.S. support. In a lunch with Bolivian service commanders, Coulter emphasized visions shared by the USG and GOB, highlighting peacekeeping, combating transnational threats, and humanitarian operations, as well as expressing U.S. support for increased bilateral training and exchanges. Coulter discussed Bolivian democracy, sovereignty and current challenges to Bolivian and regional security with Vice Foreign Minister Hugo Fernandez, as well as with a group of War College students. Overall, DAS Coulter's visit provided an opportunity to strengthen the pol-mil relationship, and his positive messages about U.S. interest in Bolivia were well-received. End summary.

PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS BRIEFING;
VISIT TO MILITARY POLICE BATTALION

12. (SBU) Brig. Gen. Walter Panozo gave DAS Coulter a briefing on Bolivia's participation in UN peacekeeping operations May 19. Panozo provided a history of Bolivia's contributions, beginning with peacekeepers in Angola, and continuing through present-day missions in the Congo and Haiti. In total, Bolivians have participated in six different peacekeeping missions involving a total of 2,333 troops. Panozo also spoke at length about the Bolivian army's newest endeavor to establish a peacekeeping operations training center in Santa Cruz. While still in early stages, the Bolivian military is hoping to secure international cooperation (including from the United States) to further this effort.

13. (SBU) Following the peacekeeping briefing, DAS Coulter visited the U.S.-trained and equipped military police battalion in Miraflores. The military police focused their presentation on riot control, showing DAS Coulter a video of the February and October 2003 violence and their outdated stock of U.S.-donated riot gear. They gave Coulter a demonstration of how the military-police use the U.S.-donated Neptune tank (armored vehicle with water canon) to respond to social disturbances. The military police's overall message was that they are a professional force but need updated equipment. They showed Coulter makeshift equipment which they were using and outlined their needs for shields, helmets and bullet-proof vests. They also pointed out that given their current stockpiles of tear gas, they only have

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sufficient supply for a one hour social conflict.

VISIT TO NAVAL BASE

14. (SBU) On May 9, DAS Coulter toured the Fourth Naval District Base on Lake Titicaca, home to Bolivia's high-altitude scuba diving and rescue school. The school's instructor briefed Coulter on Bolivia's dive program and thanked him for the USG-donated dive equipment (tanks, wetsuits, air compressors, fins, etc.,) and made an informal request for additional gear. (Note: The current class of divers was attending a course in Venezuela. End Note). Coulter also viewed the base's hospital boat, a U.S. excess defense article (EDA) donation, which provides medical services to many small, remote lakeside communities. Officers explained that the vessel previously made ten trips a year, but due to fuel and parts shortages now only makes two.

MEETING WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE

15. (C) In a May 10 meeting with Minister of Defense Walker San Miguel, DAS Coulter said he was glad to be able to follow up on their meeting at the 7th Annual Defense Ministerial of the Americas, held October 2006 in Managua. Coulter told the defense minister that the United States is looking for more opportunities to engage with Bolivia, particularly in areas where we share visions and concerns, to include combating transnational threats to hemispheric security, international peacekeeping, and humanitarian operations. Coulter noted the Bolivian military's resource constraints but said he was impressed with the soldiers' "can do" attitude. Coulter highlighted Bolivia's participation in peacekeeping operations as a positive contribution to international stability, and also noted the benefits that accrue to Bolivia as a result of interactions with other nations' troops. Coulter told San Miguel that the USG is working hard to execute New Horizons, the humanitarian military exercise

planned for July-August, and is looking forward to San Miguel's June visit to Washington.

¶6. (C) San Miguel responded by acknowledging U.S. military cooperation and said Bolivia is disposed to deepen its mil-mil relationship with the United States. He said Bolivia faces many challenges, and is hampered by a lack of military resources, but has great potential, too. San Miguel proudly told Coulter that Bolivia's peacekeeping troops stand out for "their solidarity and discipline," which he personally witnessed when he visited the troops in Haiti last month. He said his soldiers' participation in peacekeeping missions makes them stronger professionally, which translates to improved operational capacity for the armed forces in general as those soldiers advance in the ranks.

¶7. (C) San Miguel emphasized capacity building and force modernization, noting that the Bolivian army needs vehicles and the navy needs boats. He said the armed forces had faced challenges in responding to this year's natural disasters, and expressed gratitude for NAS assistance. San Miguel said the Bolivian armed forces strive to become inter-operational with other countries in order to step up their efforts to fight arms, drugs, and human trafficking. He cited as an example of international cooperation Bolivia's detention of Colombian narcotrafficker Eduardo Ormaza who was deported May

¶9. (Note: The Embassy flew Ormaza out of country on a DEA plane, and publicly thanked the GOB for its efforts. End

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note). San Miguel said the incident served as a reminder that Bolivia needs to improve airport security. In closing, the defense minister said he welcomed Coulter's visit and looked forward to his own trip to the United States and to meeting with Secretary of Defense Gates.

LUNCH WITH SERVICE COMMANDERS

¶8. (SBU) The DCM hosted a lunch for DAS Coulter and Bolivia's military service commanders May 10. (Note: Armed Forces Commander General Wilfredo Vargas, Army Commander General Freddy Bersatti, Air Force Commander General Luis Trigo, and Navy Commander Admiral Jose Alba were in attendance. End note). Coulter told his interlocutors that his visit confirmed his view that the United States and Bolivia share a similar vision of global security threats. He said the United States wanted to deepen cooperation with Bolivia, particularly via training and exchanges. Coulter complimented the army's work in peacekeeping, noting that the United Nations says that today's need for peacekeepers will only increase in the future.

¶9. (SBU) General Vargas thanked Coulter for his visit and expressed hope for additional U.S. funding and timely cooperation. Vargas described the mil-mil relationship as positive and noted that Bolivian military officials want to enhance their long friendship with the United States, but also alluded to problems in the past. He said the army is pleased to participate in peacekeeping, and may be supported by the Bolivian navy in the future. General Bersatti added that Bolivia will rotate its troops in Haiti May 26 pending congressional approval scheduled for May 15. Bersatti admitted that elements of the GOB had expressed doubts about the GOB's commitment to peacekeeping operations but assured Coulter that the "GOB now fully supports" such missions. Bersatti made a pitch for U.S. support for Bolivia's soon-to-be-established peacekeeping center in Santa Cruz and also mentioned that Bolivia will seek Canadian assistance.

MEETING WITH VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

¶10. (SBU) In a courtesy call on Vice Foreign Minister Hugo

Fernandez, Coulter emphasized U.S. willingness to pursue enhanced cooperation with the GOB on areas of common interest, highlighting in particular peacekeeping, combating transnational threats, humanitarian operations, and joint training exercises in Bolivia. Fernandez noted that the GOB considers peacekeeping an important potential area of US-GOB cooperation, while repeating his government's policy on the need for UN reform. Fernandez noted political changes underway in Bolivia and emphasized Bolivia's sovereign right to make its own decisions. He frankly stated that the GOB disagrees with the U.S. assessment that more coca equals more cocaine. Fernandez also sought, and received from DAS Coulter, a statement about U.S. support for the territorial integrity of Bolivia. Any attempt at secession from the Bolivian state, Fernandez underscored, would be "unacceptable to Bolivia's indigenous peoples" and would inevitably lead to a regional war in which Chile, Argentina, and Brazil would "fight for the pieces" that remained of Bolivia. Coulter made it clear that the United States supported Bolivian territorial integrity. (Note: Regarding this issue, Coulter repeated verbatim points made by WHA A/S Tom Shannon. End note).

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SPEECH AT BOLIVIA'S WAR COLLEGE EQUIVALENT

¶11. (SBU) Coulter also spoke at Bolivia's Diplomatic Center for Advanced National Studies on the rapidly shifting, transnational threats facing the world. He specifically referenced growing U.S. concerns with narcotics and arms trafficking, as well as human smuggling and terrorism, which he said emerge in response to lagging economies, ungoverned spaces, or disenfranchised populations. Coulter urged Bolivia to develop tools to address those threats, and explained Secretary's Rice's "transformational diplomacy," under which the USG began placing increased emphasis on engagement of partners (both within and outside the USG) to shape a more secure and stable world. Coulter highlighted the use of International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds to achieve those goals, as well as information sharing. He said the USG sought to stem weapons proliferation while assisting friends with their legitimate defense needs. Coulter said the USG was proud to partner with the GOB on UN peacekeeping operations to achieve shared goals. In response to Coulter's remarks, several participants commented on the media's role in distorting the reality in Bolivia and expressed concerns about the GOB's respect for democracy and rule of law, as well as increased coca production and its relationship to arms trafficking and terrorism. Others worried about social instability relating to autonomy, Bolivia's ability to attract future investment, and growing Venezuelan and Cuban influence in Bolivia.

COMMENT: A POSITIVE WAY FORWARD

¶12. (C) DAS Coulter's visit provided an opportunity to further the mil-mil relationship prior to the defense minister's June visit to Washington. Coulter's positive messages about U.S. interest in Bolivia were well-received. Through continued education and training, working with the rising generation of military officers, and seeking opportunities to assist Bolivia in the area of peacekeeping, humanitarian operations, and combating transnational threats, we will try to keep mil-mil relations on the right track, and in doing so, perhaps strengthen the overall bilateral relationship. End comment.

This message has been cleared by DAS Coulter.
GOLDBERG